

## Click It or Ticket It Campaign Kicks Off

BOB VAN ELSBERG

Editor, Knowledge

U.S. Army Combat Readiness Center

**T**he National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's 2007 "Click It or Ticket" Campaign will run May 21 through June 3. During the campaign, law enforcement personnel will be closely checking drivers and passengers for seat belt use. Although seat belt use is rising as a whole, NHTSA reports nearly 20 percent of Americans still fail to buckle up. Those unbelted drivers and occupants account for more than half of all vehicle fatalities.

Seat belt use within the Army isn't optional. Army Regulation 385-55, *Prevention of Motor Vehicle Accidents*, requires military personnel to wear seat belts whenever they're in a vehicle and wherever they might be driving. Seat belt use is also required by all Department of Defense civilians when they're in duty status on or off post. Also, anyone riding in a DOD-owned or leased vehicle or traveling on a DOD installation must wear their seat belt at all times.

### The "three impacts"

Buckling up is more than just obeying the law or Army regulation. Modern vehicles and seat belts are designed to protect you during the three impacts that are part of every collision.

First, there's the impact between your vehicle and the object it collides with. Included in your vehicle's design are crumple zones that allow part of the structure to crush inward to reduce the impact. However, suddenly decelerating from the speed you were going to zero mph in the distance of your crumple zone, perhaps only 3 feet, puts tremendous force on your body. No amount of stiff-arming the steering wheel or dash will keep you from flying forward and being badly injured.

The second impact is between your body and whatever stops it from moving inside your vehicle. If that's a seat belt, you'll likely be left with little more than a nasty bruise. If it's the steering wheel, dash or windshield because you're unbelted, you'll hit them at the same speed your vehicle was traveling. The front of your face, head and chest will become your personal crumple zone.

Finally, there's the impact of your organs slamming into each other or your bones. While these injuries might not be visible on the outside, they can be life-threatening. A severe impact to the chest can tear your aorta, causing you to bleed to death internally. A severe impact to your head can cause disabling or fatal brain injuries.

While there's no way to completely eliminate all impact forces during a collision, seat belts direct that force to the parts of your body that can best handle it: the bones in your hips, shoulders and chest. Beyond that, seat belts keep you inside your car so you're not thrown into traffic or crushed by your own careening vehicle.

You can't always avoid the bad choices others make while driving. However, before you get on the road, you can always make the right decision to buckle up.

### Saved by the Belt

**I**t was a sunny April day in Fort Hood, Texas, when a seat belt saved my life. My day had begun way too early with an Army Physical Fitness Test. I'd left the house about 5 a.m. to take the test with my unit, which was undergoing the unit fielding and training program for the OH-58D Kiowa Warrior. After the APFT and a full day of staff meetings and office work, I finally decided it was time to call it a day. I took the same monotonous route home I'd taken for the past several months.

Traffic was moving swiftly and, while I was glad to be off work, I was tired as I drove my wife's Mazda Miata convertible with the top down. I was traveling in the left lane of an undivided four-lane road when a car pulled out from a side street, crossed two lanes of traffic and stopped in front of me. I looked in my right-hand mirror and saw I couldn't change lanes, so I jumped



on the brakes—and the car went into a skid. The next thing I remember was hearing the Miata's horn blowing and looking at the air bag drooping from my steering wheel. Some other motorists immediately rushed to help me and the driver I'd hit.

Thanks to the airbag and my seat belt, I was uninjured except for a slightly sprained left wrist. The other driver, however, wasn't so fortunate. She wasn't wearing her seat belt and was seriously injured. Her older-model car also didn't have an air bag.

This kind of unfortunate accident is all too common on today's highways. A moment's inattention or misjudgment can have life-changing consequences. As I learned through this experience, your best countermeasure in an accident is a properly fastened seat belt. I stressed that point many times when I served as my squadron's safety officer. I'm convinced following my own advice that day saved my life.

## FYI

**According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, "Traffic crashes are not only a grave public health problem for our nation, but also a significant economic burden. Traffic crashes cost our economy approximately \$230 billion in 2000, or 2.3 percent of the U.S. gross domestic product. This translates to an annual average of \$820 for every person living in the United States." More information on traffic safety can be found at [www.nhtsa.gov](http://www.nhtsa.gov).**